

# Herndon Man's Iran Role

## Town Leader With CIA Was Instrumental in Arms-for-Hostages Deal

By DAN FELDSTEIN

THE CONNECTION

Charles E. Allen, chairman of the Herndon Planning Commission, was a key player in the Reagan administration's attempt to trade arms for hostages with Iran, according to the Tower Commission Report.

The report, released last Thursday, lists Allen's name on at least 25 of its 282 pages on the Iran-contra affair.

Allen, who is the CIA's national intelligence officer for counterterrorism, is described in the report as an important intermediary between the Reagan administration—including Lt. Col. Oliver North—and several Iranian and Israeli contacts.

Allen, who lives on Jenny Ann Court in northeast Herndon, is not described as having anything to do with funneling profits from Iranian arms sales to Nicaraguan contras, and, in fact, may have been the first person to warn CIA Director William Casey that funds were being diverted to the contras for weapons.

Allen took his concerns about what he thought might be a contra connection to Casey and CIA Deputy Director Robert Gates in October, one month before the affair became a public scandal, Allen told the commission. Allen's warning triggered a high-level discussion among CIA and administration officials, but the affair became public shortly thereafter.

"... I was very troubled in September that the operation was [about] to spin out of control..." said Allen in his testimony to the President's Special Review Board, which produced the Tower Report.

Allen recalled October 1986 conversations with Gates: "I said perhaps the money has been diverted to the contras, and I said I can't prove it. Gates was deeply disturbed by that and asked me to brief the Director... I laid out how deeply troubled I was because I could see this thing blowing up and we were going to have an incredible mess on our hands."

Allen is also indirectly identified in the report as the government official responsible for tracking American hostage locations in Lebanon. In a May 1986 memo to North included in the Tower Report, then-National Security Adviser John Poindexter wrote, "Is there any way we can get a spy into the Havy Assallum area [of Lebanon]? See Charlie's [Allen's] weekly report [on hostage locations]."

While being involved in negotiations to sell arms to Iran, seen by administration officials as a way to counter Soviet influence in Iran as well as free U.S. hostages, Allen also has been immersed in the Herndon planning process. In the past year, Allen has missed few Planning Commission meetings as Herndon has struggled to tighten parking requirements, design new building density rules and shape the future of the downtown.

"It's been a lot of hours," Allen said. "But my love of Herndon is truly deep and respectful. It represents Americana."

Allen would not comment on any aspect of his intelligence work, but said that his six-day work week combined with his part-time role as planning commissioner has been "frustrating."

"I've been so darn busy," Allen said. "But I've been honored to serve 14 years [in Herndon]." Allen, a town resident since 1962, was a Town Council member from 1967 to 1971 and a Planning Commission member from 1972 to 1974 and 1978 to the present. In between those times his work took him out of the country, he said.

Allen has been chairman of the Planning Commission for two years, and will be forced to step down from the Commission in June by a rule forbidding three consecutive terms on the Town Council-appointed body. He said he plans to remain active in Herndon civic affairs.

Although Allen is not mentioned in relation to the Nicaraguan contras by the Tower Report, he is portrayed as being in the thick of arms negotiations with Iran. Political observers have pointed out that the Reagan administration's selling of weapons to Iran flew in the face of its stated policy of not dealing with states that sponsor terrorism. But National Security Council motives in the trading of arms were described by Allen as the following:

"[T]o open up a geo-strategic relationship in the long term with Iran, to get the hostage situation out of the way as a stumbling block to any further relations with Iran, and to discourage Iran from conducting terrorism."

Allen is described by the report as having conducted negotiations with Amiram Nir, counterterrorism adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, and Manucher Ghorbanifar, Iranian businessman in France and chief link from Reagan administration officials to elements in the Iranian government. During 1986, Allen at times was the principal U.S. con-

tact for both, sometimes at the direction of Oliver North.

One hostage-release scheme attempted in January 1986, according to a North document quoted in the report, had Allen participating in an intelligence exchange with Ghorbanifar. Allen was to give Ghorbanifar information on the Iraqi war front in exchange for information on Iranian terrorism to get larger arms-for-hostages exchanges rolling. A North timeline read partially as follows:

"Saturday, January 25—Dispatch intel sample to Gorba via Charlie Allen.

"Sunday, January 26—C. Allen deliver intel sample to Gorba at Churchill Hotel, London."

The North timeline continued with an elaborate account of how arms would be sold to Iran through Israel and American hostages would all be released, but the plan failed.

Earlier in January 1986, Allen conducted a five-hour interview of Iranian contact Ghorbanifar at the request of CIA Director Casey. "Subject [Ghorbanifar] stated that he wished to work with the U.S. Government and CIA in a number of areas," Allen told the Tower Commission. "Subject stated that he had convinced the [Iranian] Prime Minister and the Minister of Oil to trust the United States with Israel acting as an intermediary... We have hard evidence that he is close to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Oil, and other senior officials like an official in the Prime Minister's office. There is no question, however, that he exaggerates and inflates for his own reasons some relationships."

Allen also told the Tower Commission that several years earlier the CIA had developed a mistrust of Ghorbanifar, who continued to be a key Iranian contact for lack of a better one.

Allen gave his testimony before the Tower Commission Dec. 30 and Feb. 11. After his Dec. 30 hearing, he came home in the evening to attend a special Town Council work session in which town government priorities were set for 1987. The priorities were seen as placing a new heavy workload on the Planning Commission.

Allen's second day of testimony occurred two days after he sat as a guest through a three-hour conference between the Town Council, Elderly Housing Commission and Herndon Harbor Housing as they worked out their differences on a site for housing for the elderly in Herndon.

Allen, 52, lives in Herndon with his wife, Kay, and daughter, Amy. He has three grown children.



**Charles E. Allen**